

What does that cloud look like to you?

CODELL SPRAWLED face up in what passed for his bedroom. The “room” was a doorless alcove and the “bed” was a mattress on the floor. The wall at the head of the bed served as a headboard.

The lingering smell of smoke wafted in from the charred ruins next door. In a neighboring apartment, a toilet flushed. Water ran through the pipes. Codell’s warm, wet, sporadic flatulence punctuated the quiet and gave meaning to the phrase “passing minutes.” Head on his pillow, hands behind his head, through his screenless, curtainless window, Codell watched clouds scud through the little piece of Detroit sky visible to him. One edge of a cloud would be fluffy and another edge of the same cloud might be wispy. Later, you never knew when, another cloud would drift into view.

The clouds looked like cold clumps, like faded bleach spills on a blue tablecloth or rips in blue blanket that revealed a white sheet beneath it. A rectangular cloud with round corners looked like nothing so much as an old-fashioned gravestone. RIP would be engraved on it. Rest In Peace, Victor. Where will you be buried? Anywhere? Or will they incinerate the incinerated you and dump your dust in the trash like so much dirt? Where are you?

Where were all of them? There was his cousin Terrell at Woodmere Cemetery, OD’d on T’s and Blues before he got to 20. And Ray-gun Spenser slept forever at Elmwood, and Jimmy and Johnni P, all three drunk and drugged playing chicken on Telegraph Road in Ray’s old man’s Caddie. DEAD drunk. There was Freddie

Deerfield, buried five peaceful years at Holy Cross, who had had enough, enough, to blow his brains out after his girl broke it off with him. Where was his brother Winston, drowned so many years ago? And Codell's father . . . where was he? Who was he?

Where were the gangs now, still killing each other? Revenge was the deadliest drug. They couldn't see past their street corners. When the battlefield swallows every battle, it doesn't matter who wins. They never had a chance.

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